

**Children's Moral Emotions and Moral Cognition:
Towards An Integrative Perspective**

Tina Malti, Brigitte Latzko

The definitive version is available at www3.interscience.wiley.com. This is the pre-peer reviewed version of the following article:

Malti, T., & Latzko, B. (2010). Children's moral emotions and moral cognition: Towards an integrative perspective. *New Directions for Child and Adolescent Development*, 129, 1-10.,

This article has been published in final form at <http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1002/cd.272/abstract>

Abstract

This chapter presents a brief introduction to the developmental and educational literature linking children's moral emotions to cognitive moral development. A central premise of the chapter is that an integrative developmental perspective on moral emotions and moral cognition provides an important conceptual framework for understanding children's emerging morality and designing developmentally sensitive moral intervention strategies. The subsequent chapters present promising conceptual approaches and empirical evidence linking children's moral emotions to moral cognition. Examples of integrated educational interventions intended to enhance children's moral development are presented and discussed.

Keywords: Moral emotions, moral cognition, moral development, moral education, childhood

Author Note

Tina Malti, Harvard Medical School, Harvard University and Jacobs Center for Productive Youth Development, University of Zurich; Brigitte Latzko, Department of Education, University of Leipzig.

Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to Tina Malti, Harvard Medical School, 115 Mill Street, Belmont MA 02478, USA. Electronic mail may be sent to malti@jacobscenter.uzh.ch

Perspective

In recent years, the centuries-old debate on how to frame the role of moral emotions and moral cognition in human morality has experienced a renaissance (Malti, Gummerum, & Keller, 2008). Although the issue is far from resolved, there is a consensus that ordinary moral concepts and moral emotions are linked. For example, moral emotions, such as compassion or guilt feelings, are recognized as influencing a person's understanding of the prescriptive nature of the norms of fairness and caring (Nussbaum, 2001). Therefore, developmental researchers have recently called for an integrative approach to the study of moral cognition and moral emotions, as well as their emergence in human development (Smetana & Killen, 2008; Turiel, in press). Although moral judgments are assumed to be at the core of children's morality, it is also claimed that moral emotions help children anticipate the outcomes of sociomoral events and adjust their moral behavior accordingly (Arsenio, Gold, & Adams, 2006; Malti, 2010). Moral emotions such as sympathy represent a genuine orientation towards the other's welfare; conjointly with moral cognition, they are very important to the early development of moral action tendencies (Eisenberg, 2000; Hoffman, 2000; Keller, 1996; Tangney, Stuewig, & Mashek, 2007).

The emphasis placed on moral emotions in the study of moral cognition and moral behavior has been highlighted in recent theoretical and empirical work, and promising first steps towards empirical integration have been taken. So far, however, the research has not been well integrated, and the few published studies have focused primarily on a particular moral emotion, such as guilt feelings, and its relation to moral cognition. This focus is overly narrow and fails to take account of the role of other moral emotions (e.g., empathy, shame, pride) and moral cognition, as each of these emotions may follow a distinct developmental trajectory. How can we describe these

integration of educational efforts aimed at bridging the gap between moral emotions and moral cognition?

In this volume, we conceptualize moral emotions as self-conscious or self-evaluative emotions, because the individual's understanding and evaluation of the self are fundamental to emotions such as guilt feelings (Eisenberg, 2000). This description also indicates that cognitive moral processes are closely related to these emotions, and a strict distinction between cognition and emotions seems therefore not necessary (Krettenauer, Malti, & Sokol, 2008). Psychological theories on morality have described emotions such as guilt, empathy, shame, but also positively charged emotions such as pride as quintessential part of children's emerging morality, because these emotions genuinely express a moral orientation of caring and internalized norm orientation; furthermore, they can serve as motives in the genesis of moral action tendencies (Keller, 1996, 2004; Malti & Keller, in press; Tangney et al., 2007). Without the anticipation of moral emotions, on the other hand, moral knowledge and cognitive moral complexity may be used strategically to achieve personal goals (Gasser & Keller, 2009).

This volume aims to shed light on this debate by discussing how the role of moral emotions and moral cognition in children's emerging morality can best be understood. Examples of educational interventions that integrate moral emotions and moral cognition are also provided.

Developmental Research on Children's Moral Emotions and Moral Cognition

Children increasingly come to understand and make moral judgments in situations involving moral transgressions, as well as anticipate the emotions of the people involved in the situations. But how do moral emotions and moral cognition evolve during the course of childhood, and how does their interdependency change across development? These questions are at the heart

cognition. Children experience a variety of emotions during moral conflicts, and these affective representations influence their subsequent judgments and behavior (Arsenio, 2008; Gummerum, Hanoch, & Keller, 2008).

Moral emotions are considered to be self-conscious because they presuppose an understanding of the relation between the self and others that is obtained through self-evaluation (Eisenberg, 2000). In other words, the anticipation of these emotions presupposes the cognitive ability to take the other's perspective (Harris, 1989) and thus shows that moral emotions and moral cognition are interdependent.

Social domain research has shown that young children construct moral judgments from early on and distinguish them from social conventions (Turiel, 1983). Developmental researchers assume that the process of constructing moral judgments in early childhood is likely to be related to the development of empathy and other moral emotions (Helwig, 2008). It is very likely that young children are able to construct moral judgments, because they experience situations involving moral transgressions as emotionally salient and they associate moral emotions such as empathy or guilt with these transgressions. It is likely that as children increase their moral understanding, they come to recognize that moral transgressions are serious, generally wrong, and deserving of punishment. This increasing cognitive understanding is most likely associated with more frequent anticipations of moral emotions.

Research in the happy victimizer paradigm has shown that this cognitive moral understanding does not necessarily reflect emotional salience, particularly in young children (for reviews, see Arsenio et al., 2006; Krettenauer et al., 2008). Happy victimizer research has documented that even though young children understand the validity of a moral rule that was violated, they expect the moral wrongdoer to be happy, because they focus exclusively on the wrongdoer's personal gain. It is not typical for children under the age of 6 or 7 years to associate moral emotions such as sadness,

It remains to be seen why children's cognitive moral understanding does not match the corresponding affective reactions, even though moral cognition and moral emotions are interdependent and continuously interact during development. Research on the early precursors of morality provides some interesting insights on this question by showing how early socialization in the family influences the development of a conscience in very young children (Kochanska, Padavich, & Koenig, 1996). However, developmental research explicitly linking moral emotions to moral cognition in childhood is relatively rare and has focused almost exclusively on either the relation between empathy/sympathy and moral cognition, or the association between guilt feelings, as attributed in the happy victimizer paradigm, and moral cognition. Studies by Eisenberg and colleagues have shown that sympathy is related to children's altruistic moral reasoning and that these two variables conjointly predict prosocial behavior (see Eisenberg, Spinrad, & Sadovsky, 2006, for a review). The few studies that have directly addressed the relationship of emotions such as guilt to moral cognition have yielded inconsistent results. For example, Smetana, Campione-Barr, and Yell (2003) found few associations between the emotions attributed to a perpetrator and moral judgments by 6- to 8-year-old children. In contrast, a recent study by Malti, Gasser, and Gutzwiller-Helfenfinger (in press) documented that the moral reasoning of 5- to 9-year-old children was negatively related to their attributions of happy feelings and positively related to their attributions of guilt feelings.

In conclusion, although developmental studies have supported the view that moral emotions play an important role in determining how children deal with moral conflict situations, and that these moral emotions relate to cognitive moral understanding in meaningful ways, relatively few studies have investigated the relation between various moral emotions and moral cognition in the course of development. We also lack a systematic developmental

approach to the study of children's emerging moral emotions and moral cognition. This astonishing state should stimulate efforts to clarify the role of both factors in the development of a child's morality and the complexity inherent in this process (Arsenio et al., 2006). Specifically, it remains unclear what are a) the developmental relations between moral emotions and cognition, and b) the varying relations among different types of moral emotions (e.g., sympathy, guilt, pride) and moral cognition.

Developing Children's Moral Emotions and Moral Cognition through Education

Despite the increasing consensus among developmental researchers that moral emotions and moral cognition are interdependent and reciprocally interact with each other over the course of development, most of the common moral interventions in childhood have focused on promoting children's cognitive moral development. This focus seems surprising, as current developmental research indicates rather consistently that although children understand the validity of moral rules, they do not necessarily understand the emotional consequences of following or breaking them. As immoral conduct is, in part, related to this lack of moral emotions, it is important to introduce a wide range of moral emotions into educational practice in a systematic way. The failure so far to do so is also surprising, because moral emotions such as guilt or sympathy have been shown to relate to prosocial dispositions (Eisenberg et al., 2006; Malti, et al., 2009), and these dispositions are a key goal of many social-emotional learning programs. In short, educational research appears to lag behind developmental research in the process of integrating children's moral cognition and moral emotions.

This strong emphasis on the promotion of cognitive moral growth can be traced back to the Kohlbergian tradition. One of the best-known educational approaches to enhancing cognitive moral development is the Just Community, an approach in the Kohlberg tradition. This approach, which has been widely and

successfully applied (1984; see Oser, Althof, & Higgins-DAlessandro, 2008), focuses on the promotion of competence in moral judgments by stimulating the development of cognitive structures through moral dialogue, moral interactions, and participation. One can assume that interaction and participation are also important resources for teaching moral emotions. In the Just Community approach, learning of moral emotions may tend to be spontaneous rather than explicit or systematic. However, the teaching of moral emotions is not mentioned as such in the presentations of the Just Community's theoretical framework. A strategy commonly used in the Just Community classroom to promote cognitive moral growth is the dilemma discussion. This technique has become popular, not least because its effectiveness in enhancing the competence of moral judgments has been validated by research and can easily be adapted to many school subjects (see Lind, *in press*; Patry, Weyringer, & Weinberger, 2007).

Moral reasoning and judgment skills are only one dimension of morality, however. It remains necessary to adapt the goals and purposes of moral education to the demands of a multicultural, pluralistic society, including a person's morality (Buxarraias, Martínez, Noguera, & Tey, 2003). Researchers have therefore emphasized the need to include the inculcation of moral emotions and moral action in efforts to develop moral competence (Latzko, 2008, *in press*). Such an integrative educational approach is the most likely to develop responsible and caring future generations in democratic societies (Edelstein, *in press*).

To date, there is no educational approach that explicitly addresses the promotion of moral emotions in childhood (cf. *Handbook of Moral and Character Education*, Nucci & Narvaez, 2008). Although the *Handbook of Moral Development* has described promising conceptual approaches to the study of children's moral emotions (Killen & Smetana, 2006), the educational implications of these insights appear to be in its infancy. Interventions aimed at promoting moral emotions occur predominantly in formal social-

programs such as Second Step. However, these programs tend to focus almost exclusively on the promotion of empathy. Moreover, it is common for only the cognitive component of empathy to be considered, or else the program does not distinguish between the cognitive and affective components of empathy. Finally, only a handful of intervention approaches distinguish between the various moral emotions and systematically enhance these individual components of children's morality.

In this volume, we discuss the educational approaches that overcome this problem and integrate the developmental models of moral emotion and cognition. These efforts have the potential to facilitate children's ethical development holistically and are thus a promising vehicle for enhancing their cognitive and affective moral growth (Nucci & Narvaez, 2008). The emphasis that these approaches place on the need to integrate different moral emotions in moral education is grounded in the fact that the feelings children experience in everyday moral situations have consequences for both the self and others; thus, they are important for the continued development of cognitive and affective decentration (Latzko, 2008). Emotional experiences in real-life situations can be meaningfully used as a basis for, and play a key role in initiating, children's moral learning. It is therefore important to raise educators' awareness of real-life moral conflict situations as a resource for moral education. By studying specific conflict situations and the emotions they invoke in the child - as victim, perpetrator, bystander, and/or observer - the teacher can help inculcate sociomoral sensitivity. Thus, sensitizing educators to the variety of interventions they can use in specific situations, as well as the emotions that these interventions can elicit, are key to stimulating moral growth. The present volume illustrates this proposition qualitatively using case studies.

Overview of the Volume

This volume discusses how moral emotions and moral cognition contribute to children's morality by focusing on the developmental relations between children's various moral emotions and moral cognition in different methodological contexts. This examination expresses the central theme of the volume, namely, how integrating moral emotions and moral cognition can help us understand the development of children's morality. Furthermore, the volume addresses several implications of this knowledge for education. Each chapter considers the relationships between moral emotions and moral cognition from both the developmental and educational perspectives.

The second chapter, by Eveline Gutzwiller-Helfenfinger, Luciano Gasser, and Tina Malti, moves beyond hypothetical moral issues and presents empirical findings on children's responses to real-life transgressions and their conversations about the everyday conflicts they experience. They compare the naturally occurring moral judgments and emotions of kindergarten and elementary school children, as expressed in spontaneously generated narratives about interpersonal moral conflicts, with those in hypothetical situations. In the real-life cases, children attribute a variety of various negative emotions such as anger, guilt, sadness, and fear to themselves as perpetrators, and these emotions and judgments differ from those that are evoked by hypothetical transgressions.

In the third chapter, Bruce Maxwell and Sarah DesRoches critically discuss the use of empathy in formal social-emotional learning programs. The authors highlight three common pitfalls of empathy use in typical programs of this type. First is the failure to fully appreciate the distinction between affective and cognitive empathy. Second is an overestimation of the role of imagination in empathizing. Third is the failure to act on the difference between affective and cognitive empathizing. The authors use case studies to illustrate how to avoid these pitfalls in program design.

The fourth chapter, by Gerhard Minnameier, critically examines the

emotion expectancies within the happy victimizer paradigm. This paradigm has uncovered a developmental gap between these expectancies and moral cognition, with the former lagging behind the latter. The author questions whether the happy victimizer phenomenon is necessary to explain the gap between moral cognition and moral actions. In short, he critically examines whether the conceptual distinction that traditional theoretical approaches make between moral cognition and moral emotions is valid.

The volume concludes with a chapter by Darcia Narvaez, which presents an empirically-derived model for moral education based on the Triune Ethics Theory (TET), a neurobiological theory of moral motivation that distinguishes three ethical orientations: security, engagement, and imagination. TET integrates virtue development, emphasizes the importance of emotion for moral functioning, and underscores the contribution of reasoning and deliberation for moral practice. Thus, TET provides an integrative framework for understanding the interplay between moral emotions and moral cognition across development.

In summary, by presenting new developmental and educational perspectives on the role of moral emotions and moral cognition in children's morality, this volume advances our understanding of moral development. In future research and educational practice, integrative approaches to children's morality promise to shed further light on our understanding of, and the promotion of, moral development in children.

References

- Arsenio, W. (2008). Psychological limits of economic rationality: Relational contexts and cognitive irrationality. *Human Development, 51* (4), 268-273.
- Arsenio, W., Gold, J., & Adams, E. (2006). Children's conceptions and displays of moral emotions. In M. Killen & J. Smetana (Eds.), *Handbook of moral development* (pp. 581-610). Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.

Buxarrais, M. R., Martinez, M., Noguera, E., & Tey, A. (2003).

Teachers evaluate the moral development of their students. In F. K. Oser & W. V. Veugelers (Eds.), *Teaching in moral and democratic education* (pp. 173-191). Bern, Switzerland: Peter Lang.

Edelstein, W. (in press). Werte und Kompetenzen für eine Schule der Demokratie. In B. Latzko & T. Malti (Eds.), *Moralische Entwicklung und Erziehung in Kindheit und Adoleszenz* [moral development and education in childhood and adolescence]. Göttingen, Germany: Hogrefe.

Eisenberg, N. (2000). Emotion, regulation, and moral development. *Annual Review of Psychology, 51*, 665-697.

Eisenberg, N., Spinrad, T. L., & Sadovsky, A. (2006). Empathy-related responding in children. In M. Killen & J. Smetana (Eds.), *Handbook of moral development* (pp. 517-549). Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.

Gasser, L., & Keller, M. (2009). Are the competent the morally good? Perspective taking and moral motivation of children involved in bullying. *Social Development, 18*, 798-816.

Gummerum, M., Hanoch, Y., & Keller, M. (2008). When child development meets economic game theory: An interdisciplinary approach to investigating social development. *Human Development, 51* (4), 235-261.

Harris, P. L. (1989). *Children and emotion*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

Helwig, C. C. (2008). The moral judgment of the child reevaluated. In C. Wainryb, J. G. Smetana, & E. Turiel (Eds.), *Social development, social inequalities, and social justice* (pp. 27-52). New York: Lawrence Erlbaum.

Hoffman, M. L. (2000). *Empathy and moral development: Implications for caring and justice*. Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University Press.

Keller, M. (1996). *Moralische Sensibilität: Entwicklung in Freundschaft und Familie*. [Moral sensitivity in friendship and family]. Weinheim, Germany: Psychologie-Verlags Union.

Keller, M. (2004). Self in relationship. In D. K. Lapsley & D.

Narvaez (Eds.), *Morality, self, and identity* (pp. 269-300). Mahwah, NJ: Erlbaum.

Killen, M., & Smetana, J. (Eds.) (2006). *Handbook of moral development*.

Mahwah, NJ: Erlbaum.

Krettenauer, T., Malti, T., & Sokol, B. (2008). The development of moral emotion expectancies and the happy victimizer phenomenon: A critical review of theory and application. *European Journal of Developmental Science*, 2, 221-235.

Kochanska, G., Padavich, D. L., & Koenig, A. L. (1996). Children's narratives about hypothetical moral dilemmas and objective measures of their conscience: Mutual relations and socialization antecedents. *Child Development*, 67, 1420-1436.

Kohlberg, L. (1984). *The psychology of moral development: The nature and validity of moral stages*. San Francisco: Harper and Row.

Latzko, B. (2008). No morality without autonomy: The role of emotional autonomy in moral development. In F. Oser & W. Veugelers (Eds.), *Getting involved: Global citizenship development and sources of moral values* (pp.119-129). Rotterdam: Sense Publishers.

Latzko, B. (in press). Moral education in schools: Teachers' authority and students' autonomy. In C. Klaassen & N. Malovaty (Eds.), *Education for moral democracy in modern societies*. Rotterdam: Sense Publishers.

Lind, G. (in press). Die Förderung moralisch-demokratischer Kompetenzen mit der Konstanzer Methode der Dilemma-Diskussion (KMDD). In B. Latzko & T. Malti (Eds.), *Moralische Entwicklung und Erziehung in Kindheit und Adoleszenz* [moral development and education in childhood and adolescence]. Goettingen, Germany: Hogrefe.

Malti, T., Gasser, L., & Gutzwiller-Helfenfinger, E. (in press). Children's interpretive understanding, moral judgments, and emotion attributions: Relations to social behavior. *British Journal of Developmental*

- Malti, T., Gummerum, M., Keller, M., & Buchmann, M. (2009). Children's moral motivation, sympathy, and prosocial behavior. *Child Development, 80*, 442-460.
- Malti, T., & Keller, M. (in cooperation with F.X. Fang, A. Edele, & G. Sigurdardottir) (in press). Development of moral emotions in cultural context. In W. Arsenio & E. Lemerise (Eds.), *Emotions, aggression, and morality in children: Bridging development and psychopathology*. Washington: American Psychological Association.
- Nucci, L.P., & Narvaez, D. (Eds.) (2008). *Handbook of moral and character education*. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.
- Nussbaum, M. (2001). *Upheavals of thought: The intelligence of emotions*. Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University Press.
- Oser, F., Althof, W., & Higgins-D'Alessandro, A. (2008). The Just Community approach to moral education: System change or individual change? *Journal of Moral Education, 37* (3), 395-415.
- Patry, J.-L., Weyringer, S., & Weinberger, A. (2007). Combining values and knowledge education. In D. N. Aspin & J. D. Chapman (Eds.), *Values education and lifelong learning* (pp. 160-179). Dodrecht: Springer.
- Smetana, J.G., Campione-Barr, N., & Yell, N. (2003). Children's moral and affective judgments regarding provocation and retaliation. *Merrill-Palmer Quarterly, 49* (2), 209-236.
- Smetana, J. G., & Killen, M. (2008). Moral cognition, emotion, and neuroscience: An integrative developmental view. *European Journal of Developmental Science, 2*, 324-339.
- Tangney, J., Stuewig, J., & Mashek, D. (2007). Moral emotions, moral cognitions, and moral behavior. *Annual Review, 58*, 345-372.
- Turiel, E. (1983). *The development of social knowledge. Morality and convention*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Turiel, E. (in press). The development of morality: Reasoning, emotions, and

resistance. In W. Overton (Ed.), *Handbook of lifespan human development*. New York: Wiley.

TINA MALTI is a Visiting Research Scientist at Harvard Medical School and a Senior Research Scientist at the Jacobs Center for Productive Youth Development at the University of Zurich. E-mail: mali@jacobscenter.uzh.ch

BRIGITTE LATZKO is an Assistant Professor at the Faculty of Education, Department of Educational Psychology, at the University of Leipzig. E-mail: latzko@uni-leipzig.de